THE WORLD.

NUMBER CXCV.

By *ADAM FITZ-ADAM.*

To be continued every THURSDAY.

THURSDAY, *September* the 23d, 1756.

——*Generoſius*
Perire quærens, nec muliebriter
Expavit enſem. HOR.

To Mr. FITZ-ADAM.

SIR,

TO a well-diſpoſed mind there can be no greater ſatisfaction than the knowledge that one's labours for the good of the public have been crowned with ſucceſs. This, ſir, is remarkably the caſe of your paper of Sept. the 9th on Suicide; a faſhionable rage, which I hope you will proceed to expoſe; and I do not doubt but you will be as famous for rooting out what, may I be allowed to call, *ſingle combat*, or the humour of fighting with one's ſelf, as your predeceſſor the Tatler was for exploding the ridiculous

diculous cuſtom of duels. The pleaſantry of your eſſay on the reigning mode of voluntary deaths, has preſerved to a little neighbourhood a very hoſpitable gentleman, to the poor a good friend, to a very deſerving ſon and daughter a tender parent, and has ſaved the perſon himſelf from a very fooliſh exit. This character, ſir, which perhaps from a natural partiality I may have drawn a little too amiably, I take to be my own; and not to trouble you with the hiſtory of a man who has nothing remarkable belonging to him, I will only let you into what is ſo far neceſſary, as that I am a gentleman of about fifty, have a moderate eſtate in very good condition, have ſeen a great deal of the world, and without being weary of it, live chiefly in the country with children whom I love. You will be curious to know what could drive my thoughts to ſo deſperate a reſolution, when I tell you farther, that I hate gaming, have buried my wife, and have no one illneſs. But alas! ſir, I am extremely *well-born*: Pedigree is my diſtemper; and having obſerved how much the mode of ſelf-murder prevails among people of rank, I grew to think that there was no *living* without *killing* one's ſelf. I reflected how many of my great anceſtors had fallen in battle, by the axe, or in duels, according as the turn of the ſeveral ages in which they lived, diſpoſed of the nobility; and I thought the deſcendant of ſo many heroes muſt contrive to periſh by means as violent and illuſtrious. What a diſgrace, thought I, for the great grandſon of Mowbrays, Veres and Beauchamps to die in a good old age of a fever! I bluſhed whenever I caſt my eyes on our genealogy in the little parlour—I determined to ſhoot myſelf. It is true, no man ever had more reluctance to leave the world; and when I went to clean my piſtols, every drop of Mowbray blood in my veins ran as cold as ice. As my conſtitution is good and hearty, I thought it would be time enough to *die ſuddenly* twenty or thirty years hence; but happening about a month ago to be near choaked by a fiſh bone, I was alarmed for the honour of my family, and have been ever ſince *preparing for death*. The letter to be left on my table (which indeed coſt me ſome trouble to compoſe, as I had no reaſon to give for my *ſudden reſolution*) was written out fair, when I read your paper; and from that minute I have

have changed my mind; and though it ſhould be ever ſo great a diſgrace to my family, I am reſolved to live as long and as happily as I can.

You will no doubt, good ſir, be encouraged from this example to purſue the reformation of this contagious crime. Even in the ſmall diſtrict where I live, I am not the only inſtance of a propenſity to ſuch a cataſtrophe. The lord of the manor, whoſe fortune indeed is much ſuperior to mine, though there is no compariſon in the antiquity of our families, has had the very ſame thought. He is turned of ſixty-ſeven, and is devoured by the ſtone and gout. In a dreadful fit of the former, as his phyſician was ſitting by his bedſide, on a ſudden his lordſhip ceaſed roaring, and commanded his relations and chaplain to withdraw, with a compoſure unuſual to him even in his beſt health; and putting on the greateſt appearance of philoſophy, or what, if the chaplain had ſtaid, would have been called reſignation, he commanded the doctor to tell him, if his caſe was really deſperate. The phyſician, with a ſlow profuſion of latinized evaſions, endeavoured to elude the queſtion, and to give him ſome glimmerings of hope, *that there might be a chance that the extremity of the pain would occaſion a degree of fever, that might not be mortal in itſelf, but which, if things did not come to a criſis ſoon, might help to carry his lordſhip off.* "I "underſtand you by G—d," ſays his lordſhip, with great tranquility and a few more oaths; "Yes, d—n "you, you want to kill me with ſome of your con- "founded diſtempers; but I'll tell you what, I only "aſked you, becauſe if I can't poſſibly live, I am de- "termined to kill myſelf; for rot me! if it ſhall ever be "ſaid that a man of my quality died of a curſed natural "death. There, tell Boman to give you your fee, and "bid him bring me my piſtols." However the fit abated, and the neighbourhood is ſtill waiting with great impatience to be *ſurprized* with an account of his lordſhip's having ſhot himſelf.

However, Mr. Fitz-Adam, extenſive as the ſervice is which you may render to the community by aboliſhing this heatheniſh practice, I think in ſome reſpects it is to be treated with tenderneſs; in one caſe always to be tolerated.

tolerated. National courage is certainly not at high-water mark: what if the notion of the dignity of ſelf-murder ſhould be indulged till the end of the war? A man who has reſolution enough to kill himſelf, will certainly never dread being killed by any body elſe. It is the privilege of a *free-dying Engliſhman*, to chuſe his death: if any of our high-ſpirited notions are cramped, it may leaven our whole fund of valour; and while we are likely to have occaſion for all we can exert, I ſhould humbly be of opinion, that you permitted ſelf-murder till the peace, upon this condition, that it ſhould be diſhonourable for any man to kill himſelf, till he had found that no Frenchman was brave enough to perform that ſervice for him.

INDEED the very celebration of this myſtery has been tranſacted hitherto in a manner ſomewhat mean, and unworthy people of faſhion. No tradeſman could hang himſelf more felonioufly than our very nobles do. There is none of that open defiance of the laws of their country, none of that contempt for what the world may think of them, which they ſo properly wear on other occaſions. They ſteal out of the world from their own cloſets, or before their ſervants are up in a morning. They leave a miſerable apology behind them, inſtead of ſitting up all night drinking, till the morning comes for diſpatching themſelves. Unlike their great originals, the Romans, who had reduced ſelf-murder to a ſyſtem of good-breeding, and uſed to *ſend cards* to their acquaintance to notify their intention. Part of the duty of the week in Rome was to *leave one's name* at the doors of ſuch as were ſtarving themſelves. Particular friends were *let in*; and if very intimate, it was even expected that they ſhould uſe ſome common-place phraſes of diſſuaſion. I can conceive no foundation for our ſhabby way of bolting into t'other world, but that obſolete law which inflicts a croſs-road and a ſtake on ſelf-executioners: a moſt abſurd ſtatute; nor can I imagine any penalty that would be effectual, unleſs one could condemn a man who had killed himſelf, to be brought to life again. Somewhere indeed I have read of a ſucceſsful law for reſtraining this crime. In ſome of the Grecian

ſtates

ſtates the women of faſhion incurred the anger of Venus—I quite forget upon what occaſion; perhaps for little or none: goddeſſes in thoſe days were ſcarce leſs whimſical than their fair votaries—Whatever the cauſe was, ſhe inſpired them with a fury of ſelf-murder. The legiſlature of the country, it ſeems, thought the reſentment of the deity a little arbitrary; and to put a ſtop to the practice, deviſed an expedient, which one ſhould have thought would have been very inadequate to the evil. They ordered the beauteous bodies of the lovely delinquents to be hung up naked by one foot in the public ſquares. How the fair offenders came to think this attitude unbecoming, or why they imagined any poſition that diſcovered all their charms, could be ſo, is not mentioned by hiſtorians; nor, at this diſtance of time, is it poſſible for us moderns to gueſs: certain it is, that the penalty put a ſtop to the barbarous cuſtom.

But what ſhall one ſay to thoſe countries, which not only allow this crime, but encourage it even in that part of the ſpecies, whoſe ſoftneſs demands all protection, and ſeems moſt abhorrent from every thing ſanguinary and fierce? We know there are nations, where the magiſtrate gravely gives permiſſion to the ladies to accompany their huſbands into the other world, and where it is reckoned the greateſt profligacy for a widow not to demand leave to burn herſelf alive. Were this faſhion once to *take* here, I tremble to think what havock it would occaſion. Between the natural propenſity to ſuicide, and the violence of conjugal engagements, one ſhould not ſee ſuch a thing as a lozenge, or a widow. Adieu jointures! adieu thoſe ſoft reſources of the brave and neceſſitous! What unfortunate relict but would prefer being buried alive to the odious embraces of a ſecond paſſion? Indeed, Mr. Fitz-Adam, you muſt keep a ſtrict eye on our fair country-women. I know one or two, who already wear pocket piſtols; which, conſidering the tenderneſs of their natures, can only be intended againſt their own perſons. And this article leads me naturally to the only caſe, in which, as I hinted above, I think ſelf-murder always to be allowed. The moſt admired